

**STATEMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY TO THE
CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY TO THE MEETING
OF THE EXPERT PANEL ON ACCESS TO GENETIC RESOURCES
AND BENEFIT-SHARING
SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA
4 – 8 OCTOBER 1999**

Excellencies,
Distinguished experts,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all to this important expert meeting on access to genetic resources and arrangements for sharing the benefits of their use.

It is most appropriate that this meeting is being held in the beautiful capital of Costa Rica, a country that is exceptionally rich in biodiversity and genetic resources and for which the subject-matter of this meeting is of direct relevance. It offers an ideal venue for our deliberations.

In this connection, I wish to take the opportunity to express my profound appreciation to the Government of Costa Rica for the warm welcome, generous hospitality and for the excellent organizational arrangements, which I am confident will ensure the smooth-running of the meeting and will pave the way for a fruitful outcome of the deliberations.

I also wish to express my deep gratitude to the Government of Switzerland for co-hosting this meeting and for providing the financial support which, together with the financial support received from Norway, has enabled this meeting to take place.

I need not emphasize the importance of this expert consultation. The fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of technology, is one of the three stated objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, along with the conservation of

biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components. It is also a very complex issue with major ramifications.

As you know, many Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity attach considerable significance to this fundamental objective. It is fair to say that many regard progress on this issue as one of the keys to the success of the Convention as a whole. I would venture to add that the achievement of all three interrelated objectives is essential to the successful implementation of the Convention.

The Conference of the Parties has addressed the issue of access and benefit-sharing on several occasions. The issue was also examined at the recent Inter-Sessional Meeting on the Operations of the Convention, in June 1999. However, work in this key area, both at the national and international levels, remains very much at a preliminary stage: that of defining concepts and identifying measures required to implement them.

The Conference of the Parties decided to establish this Panel of Experts at its fourth meeting, in Bratislava, in May 1998. It is the first time under the Convention that a body has been established specifically to address access and benefit sharing. Thus, the present Panel of Experts is the main tool that the Conference of the Parties has given itself to advance this process.

You have been selected for this meeting because of your diverse expertise on the subject. You have a unique opportunity to help shape future discussions on this key issue at the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties. It is my hope that, in keeping with your mandate as set out in decision IV/8 of the Conference of the Parties, you will use the time available in the next few days « to develop a common understanding of the basic concepts and to explore all options for access and benefit sharing on mutually agreed terms including guiding principles, guidelines, and codes of best practice for access and benefit-sharing arrangements ».

In other words, you are expected to further define the concepts and identify ways and means to put them into practice in the real world. This would be a key contribution, which would constitute an important step forward in the Convention's implementation. Naturally, the results of your work will be at the core of deliberations of the Conference of the Parties on this issue when it meets in May next year.

To assist you in your deliberations in this week, the Secretariat has prepared a background document which was distributed before the meeting. The document provides an overview of the basic questions identified by the Conference of the Parties and further developed by the Parties at the more recent Inter-Sessional Meeting on the Operations of the Convention. It is hoped that it will assist you in structuring your discussions.

Finally, as you are about to embark on your exploration of largely uncharted territory, I wish to assure you of the full support of the Secretariat. My colleagues and I will spare no efforts to assist you in your deliberations.

I wish you the best of luck for a successful meeting.

Thank you